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WHAT MODIFICATIONS IN WESTERN CHRISTIANITY MAY BE EXPECTED FROM CONTACT WITH ORIENTAL RELIGIONS ON THE MISSION FIELD?

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The topic assigned me is of great difficulty, so many are the factors and so indefinite are the terms. What is "western Christianity," and who shall describe the "oriental religions"? Had the question been asked a generation ago, the answer would not have been difficult; for then it was taken for granted that the truth of Christianity was expressed in the doctrine and maintained by the organization of one's own sect, and oriental religions, all alike, were corruptions of the original revelation of God through man's depravity, or were the inventions of Satan. This attitude has abundant illustrations in missionary literature, and it was quite generally maintained until recent years. For example, in January, 1882, a distinguished missionary in China attacked Max Müller as a foe to missions and as a heathen because he had instituted the series of translations of the Sacred Books of the East. The translation itself was an offense; but the use of the title *Sacred* definitely fixed Müller's status. Moreover, at even a later date, some missionaries in answer to the query from Chinamen, "Where now is Confucius?" were prompt to reply, "In Hell."

The change from this position to the one dominant in our day is complete. But can we consider it as the result of contact with oriental religions on the mission field? That this contact has had great effect is beyond question; for even less intimate knowledge produced important results. For example, in the eighteenth century in certain circles rumors about China affected the estimate of the Christian religion. In the deistic controversy two discoveries were influential, that of the heavens and that of the great eastern empire. It was asked "How can the creator of this vast universe be identified with the God of the Jews and how can the gospel be necessary, since the people of China have existed so long and, on the whole, so well without it?" Hence an

effort was made to find a religion of nature, simple enough and large enough for the new array of facts. The controversy died away, leaving little mark upon English Christianity, though it made a revolutionary impression upon the Continent; but in our day in other forms and more portentously it revives, for wider circles in England and the United States have taken the modern cosmology into their imagination, and prolonged contact with Asia has made its problem very real.

In the eighteenth century the greatness of the numbers played a part in the argument—three hundred million Chinamen! But we have multiplied this by four—such a vast array of heathen, such a vast mass of the lost! The greatness of the work is appalling. And the old missionary hymns lose their effectiveness. It is no longer—

> Each wind that sweeps the ocean brings tidings from afar
> Of nations in commotion prepared for Zion's war.

It is only the youthful enthusiasm of the Student Volunteer Movement which can retain as a motto, now twenty years old, "The Evangelization of the World in this Generation." With this apprehension is joined the conception, which forced itself long ago upon Macaulay, that in the presence of those who worship cows the differences which separate Christians are slight. Hence on a wide scale we have missionary comity and attempted federations of native churches, and even their combination into organic unity.

This expresses the attitude of the majority of missionaries as the sectarian spirit indicated in the first paragraph of this article passes away. Missionaries may indeed prefer their own type of organization, and believe that the doctrine of their sect more completely expresses the mind of the Spirit than do other statements, but they are conscious that the task is too great for their unaided efforts and that only in union is there strength. Moreover, the impression has become dominant that our forms of western ecclesiasticism are not final and that the orientals may be trusted, under the guidance of the Spirit, to evolve their own types of our common Christianity.

The change in these respects in thirty years has been so great that the missionary enterprise has passed over into a new stage. The older was typified by the missionary who was supposed to deliver the bread of life to people hungering for it and eager in their response.

He was to be the director, the guide, the formulator, and in general the apostle of the new dispensation. Excepting in distinctly stagnant fields, the missionary now counts himself to be the sower of a seed which shall in due time propagate itself; or, to drop the figure, having gathered together his little company of believers, he commits to them the gospel and remains as advisor and friend, but not as director or even as leader. His motto is: they must increase, but I must decrease. His highest hope is that his labors and those of others like himself shall be rendered unnecessary. It has become a maxim of missionary labor that a nation can be evangelized only by its own children, and that Christianity can become a dominant factor only as it is adapted to the needs and the traditions and the social organism of the people.

All of this involves a modification in the conception of Christianity; and this is characteristic of missionary preaching. The missionary deals with the fundamentals of religion and not with the points around which theological battles have raged. His faith becomes at once something less and something more than before; something less in its relative simplicity and something more in the thoroughness with which the fundamentals are grasped. Before the movement had taken its present definiteness in the West it was already common for missionaries, in fields like Japan, where the influences of progress were most strongly felt, to be looking for essential Christianity in the midst of the diversities of discordant sects and, even in other fields where complicated systems were held more vigorously in their entirety, the necessities of the situation caused the preaching to center in a few quite simple and definite propositions.

It is true that the missionaries were not always aware of the effect which this attempt was having upon their own faith. A young man, zealous for the system of doctrine in which he had been instructed and which he held as the truth of God, was compelled to assume an apologetic attitude. He found to begin with that he must approach his listeners from a point of view quite different from that which had been assumed in his theological seminary. He could reconcile this to his own mind by the example of St. Paul, who became all things to all men, and he could believe that after he had given the milk of the word he could proceed to feed his converts upon strong meat. But the constant effort to reduce Christianity to its fundamental propositions

and to cut off all superfluities, insensibly influenced the missionary, until by and by he was prepared to accept the position of his converts, who proved with further instruction, not to be better prepared for the whole system of doctrine, but to be the more insistent upon the simplicity which is in Christ. An eloquent Japanese in the synod of Japan closed the debate over the proposition for a simple creed and the rejection of our western complications in a paragraph which may be translated roughly thus: "These systems of theology and confessions of faith represent the conflicts of western Christianity, conflicts in which we have only a historical interest and which we would not repeat on this soil. They separate Christian from Christian, but all Christians are our brothers, one with us in a common fellowship. We would have a Confession of Faith which shall represent the living power which has changed our lives, a faith by which we may live and for which we would die."

I need not point out how this emphasis upon the essential features of Christianity in the mission field coincides with the great movement which is characteristic of western Christianity at the present time. But who shall say that the latter is the effect of the former, or fail to think that both alike are the offspring of great religious and intellectual movements, characteristic of the age in which we live, with sources too varied and too many for enumeration? Perhaps the missionary movement has been especially influential upon those more zealous for denominational peculiarities. The testimony of the missionary, his attitude of mind, his insistence upon our common faith, have affected many who are unapproachable by scholars who had arrived at somewhat similar results through the methods of scientific research. It is easy to regard these latter as rationalists, but it is hard to place with them missionaries who have given their lives to the evangelization of the heathen. Thus the modifying effect of the contact of the missionary is to be found in the realm of the ordinary and conventional church life. He has reached practically a position which is similar to that attained by scholarship, as both look to a greater unity among Christians and to an emphasizing of the common elements of the faith.

This contact with oriental peoples influences the missionary, and through him the church, in other ways. Only in a theological sense does he now sing, "Where every prospect pleases and only man is

vile," for this vileness is simply our common depravity. In the ordinary relations of life the missionary is ready enough to praise the people among whom he dwells, for even though some of his literature dwells chiefly upon the darker aspects, more intimate knowledge has begotten a broader charity. It would be easy to bring witnesses to testify to the sterling qualities and high ideals of many "heathen," men who shame by their virtues multitudes of "Christians." The problem becomes no longer one of East and West or of pagan and Christian, but of our common humanity. Thus again we are pressed back to a religion, not indeed of nature, as the eighteenth century thought, but of a world-wide validity and of a simplicity which admits of application to all mankind.

This process is furthered by the study of the oriental religions. We hesitate to sing, "The heathen in his blindness bows down to wood and stone." Missionaries have made large contributions to the scholarly knowledge of the ethnic faiths, and the general attitude is more correctly expressed by the words of St. Paul, "Whom ye in ignorance worship, Him declare I unto you," and, who "hath determined the bounds of their habitation that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel for him and find him, though he be not far from everyone of us." And once more, from the unknown author of the Epistle to the Hebrews: "God who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets"—by Confucius as by Moses, and by Buddha as by Ecclesiastes—"hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son." So far it would seem the missionaries have come, and with them the more liberal portions of the church.

The missionary is more susceptible to these influences than are other foreigners, for he is most intimately in contact with the people. Other occidentals are shut into communities of their own, and they estimate the "natives" precisely as they minister to their own convenience and pleasure. They do not so much as think of taking these folks as equals. In India, for example, British disdain has increased as the years have passed. Exceptions there are, of course; men who really study the civilization which surrounds them. A few students become enamored of it—and proclaim its superiority—but they are not taken seriously by their fellows.

The West is still too far from the East for great mutual influences, and closer contact is not always happy in its results. The West is bolting its doors against the East, after forcing the East to open its gates. A century of British rule has not won India's affection, and China turns to western ways in self-defense. Japan is the great illustration of the transformation possible through a new acquaintanceship, but it is still a century too soon to speak of the outcome. And on our part—beyond a certain vague influence in the realm of art—one questions whether Japan has affected at all the great currents of European and American life, excepting in the political sphere, and there it would seem to be a rebound from our own policies and powers.

When we turn to other aspects of the problem we are met with a like difficulty, that is to say, while there are certain tendencies of the science, philosophy, history, and literature of our day which coincide with the tendencies observable in oriental lands, one hesitates to lay too much stress upon the direct influence of contact with these oriental forces. This statement will become clearer as we emphasize the elements in Christianity and in oriental religion which are most diverse, and where the mutual influence may be corrective and beneficial.

One hesitates to ascribe anything to "Christianity" without defining that disputed word. But we are on fairly firm ground when we regard our individualism as one at least of the prominent characteristics of Christianity. Erdmann, in his *History of Philosophy*, tells us that ancient philosophy was busy with the world; but that mediaeval philosophy turned its attention to the individual. The world remained only as the stage on which was enacted the drama of God and the human soul. Before the divine word, "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" all interest in nature and in its problems vanished. From this has come our modern conception of personality, the insistence upon the value of the individual, the regard for seemingly worthless men and the notion that the self is a central point in the universe.

However we may differ from Erdmann's ascription of so much influence to this particular historical element in the development of the modern consciousness of personality, there is, I think, no question that the East remains at the earlier point which he indicates. It has never laid the same stress upon personality. This is indicated

in many ways: for example, there is not the same abhorrence of degradation through crime; that is to say, the criminal does not fall so far and the effects upon himself are consequently less marked. So too, the insistence upon the value of life is much less. One is amazed to note for what small reasons men will cast away their lives. Out of this disregard for the individual has come a certain relatively fixed type of society. Oriental annals are devoid of really great movements toward liberty and freedom and progress.

These two types of thought, the individual on the one side and what we may call, perhaps, the organic on the other, find their culmination in the ultimate idea as to God. In the West emphasis is centered in his personality and, notwithstanding the speculations of philosophical theologians and the denials of radical philosophers, what Tiele calls the theocratic type of religion prevails. That is to say, God is conceived of as the mighty monarch, the over-man of boundless wisdom and power, and our relationship to him is that ultimately of subject to sovereign or, at highest and best, of child to father.

Now it requires very slight knowledge of eastern literature to find many parallelisms to Christian thought on this theme, but nonetheless the prevailing conception in the Orient (excepting in the Mohammedan dominions) is widely different. The universe is not personal at its heart; it is a vast organism which goes on and on and on forever. It has its periods of evolution and of devolution; it begins, it grows, it comes to consummation, it decays, it returns to chaos, only that the cycle may be repeated and again repeated without end. In such a movement nations and families and individuals have their part; but they are for it and not it for them. In this movement the greater always has precedence. That is to say, the nation is more than the family and the family is more than the individual. Indeed, strictly speaking, the individual is of value only through his relationship to the organism. The man exists not for his own happiness or for his own individual consciousness, but as father, as husband, as son, as brother, his place in the order constituting in the profoundest sense himself. The conception is most nearly represented to our own mind by the military organism, where the man loses his own name and is a number in the line, it mattering very little whether as an individual he be happy or sorrowful, hopeful or discouraged, successful or a

failure, if only his efficiency as a soldier is not imperiled and if he be found in his right place at the right time.

The conception of virtue derived from this view works itself out in a twofold form: on the one hand, as a pessimism which regards the ultimate attainment of the orderly universe as an impossibility and recommends, therefore, flight from the world as the religious duty; on the other hand, as an optimism which insists that man is to stand in his place, to fulfil if possible his duty, even if it bring him suffering.

Doubtless in the East this conception of life has led to many and serious evils. As commonly interpreted, it takes away from the worth of the individual, not only in the eyes of others, but in one's own thought, for there would seem to be no most sacred place which may not be violated, even at the command of those near and dear. Indeed the paragons of virtue have given themselves unreservedly and without limit to the commands of their superiors, even when these commands have involved corruption and debauchery. Moreover, self-sacrifice itself does not attain its true significance when the individual is undervalued. It is only as man comes to know himself as the son of God that his sacrifice upon the cross has highest value for the redemption of the world.

While thus the relation of the individual to the organism may be ethically conceived—as in Confucianism—it may also be taken mystically. The end is absorption or a merging in the whole. The self is lost that it may be saved; as one feels his petty personality expanded by the influence of splendid scenery, or of great music, or of grand processions, until he blends with the vastness and gathers it into his consciousness. Especially in Hinduism and in Mahâyâna Buddhism does this yearning after the Absolute become the soul of religion. And with it comes an aloofness from the interests of men. The way of salvation is by flight from the world, and its attainment lifts the spirit into a region inaccessible to all excepting the elect.

On the other hand, who does not know that the tendencies of our modern Christianity in the western world are all in the direction of less emphasis upon the individual and more upon the social order? The coincidence of this movement with our knowledge of the thought

of the East might lead us to put them in the order of effect and cause, but again one hesitates. There are other influences at work. The conception of the immanence of God, of the necessity and power and value of the organism, or of ourselves as truly selves only as parts of the organism, can be traced too clearly to other sources to permit us to suppose that they have been derived from contact with oriental religions.

Besides, these ideals in East and West are not so similar after all. For example, modern Buddhists do not weary in repeating the statement that Buddha discovered "evolution," and thus proved his omniscience by anticipating modern science. But his doctrine had no scientific value and indeed bears no resemblance to the modern thought —at least wherein it has value. It is as a background of mystery, and of mazy metaphysics, and of symbolic poetry that the eastern literature has its value, and its influence in the future will be (to speak as a dogmatist), as in the past, in the emotional realm, in the region where aesthetics mingle with worship, and where the dim religious atmosphere is not adapted to the clearest vision, nor in the least congenial to scientific criticism. Even in this sphere the western influence for the moment is the stronger, as it is easier to point out representations of the Hindu faith whose writings show the effect of western studies than it is to name Christian scholars who have been deeply affected by oriental thought.

We write with India chiefly in mind, but China surely is equally representative of Asia, and more likely to come into intimate relations with Americans. In this country is another phase of thought, not mystical nor metaphysical but pragmatic, with its virtues firmly planted in the relationships of daily life, and its morality only slightly touched with religious emotion. A careful study of Confucianism would have its value as indicating the benefits and the defects of such a system. But one does not look for any immediate or widespread effect on us. The system is too dry—and the Chinaman to our western eyes too alien and too queer.

It is impossible to do more than to question the outcome of these converging movements. In any case, as already indicated, certain conditions in the foreign missionary field coincide with like conditions in western Christianity, and that surely is a cause for thankfulness and

hope. That while our missionaries have been learning lessons from their actual experiences in Asiatic lands, the church at home has been coming to like conclusions from its independent investigations and from the influences of the age in which we live, indicates that in this direction we are to look for important results. Indeed, the old conception of missions, like the old conception of Christianity, breaks down. It is impossible to win Asia to our modern forms of Christian doctrine and of Christian organization. It is not even desirable that our western Christianity should be transplanted to so alien an environment. We have come to see that God has not left himself without witnesses and that the Holy Spirit moves where and when it pleases; but all this is as true of ourselves at home as of the converts and the heathen in oriental lands. That is, a new confidence is begotten as one sees how God fulfils himself in many ways, and how Christianity in its living power may adapt itself to the varying needs of men.

For the future we need a franker recognition of these facts which officially are winked at rather than recognized by our churches. It is through the unreserved acceptance of the great modern movement at home and abroad that Christianity is to have the revival of its power in which we all believe. Moreover, the problem suggested of the relationship of the individual to the social organization and, in more recondite terms, of the individual to the universe, is a problem which contains within itself the very issues of life. What can we learn from the Orient which shall rectify our extreme individualism and our exaggerated emphasis upon the importance of personality, and how shall we, taught by the East, perhaps, learn this without losing our heritage?

Perhaps, finally, we lay too much emphasis upon this distinction of East and West and upon the question of our mutual influence. As already indicated, there are other forces at work of world-wide import; and the new age on which we are entering knows neither East nor West, but only our common humanity. The notion that we need some peculiar mediator between East and West or that East as East is to bear peculiar lessons to West as West is, in my judgment, mistaken. If the East had still remained secluded and we had felt no breath of its influence, still would our philosophers and poets have

taught us the immanence of God and still would our modern psychology have emphasized the importance of the organism, and still would the development of our modern cosmogony have taught us that God may be described in terms of a power not ourselves which makes for righteousness, though it be difficult for us to reconcile it with that which wells up in us as personal consciousness.

In science and philosophy we do not look for any peculiar contribution from the East. Truth is one and the method of its discovery is one. The Orient has had glimpses of truth—foreshadowings of important discoveries—but they have remained comparatively unfruitful. The learned world recognizes no distinctions of race or nation, but only differences in the application of the method which has proved itself to be effective. Why should religion be an exception? If it were the outcome of some special faculty, if it were the discernment of a sphere unknowable by reason and not subject to its laws, we might indeed anticipate discoveries by ascetics and mystics. But for us who have given up that position and believe that religion has to do, not with the abnormal and the mystical, but that it is the natural outcome of man's contact with his environment and the expression of his true nature, it is vain to look for peculiar contributions from men who have not adopted the modern point of view. In religion as in science there is one truth, and its discovery follows the application of definite methods. Any other position turns us back from the light of the present to the theosophy and the superstitions of the past.